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AESCHYLUS

THE SUPPLIANT WOMEN

[SUPPLICES]

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE
WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE *Supplices*, or *Suppliant Women*, of Aeschylus is generally recognized as the earliest of extant Greek plays. It is certainly the most primitive, and perhaps, in the common opinion of scholars, the most stiff, helpless, and unintelligible. Yet it is not only a document of extraordinary interest to a student of the origins of drama; it has also on its own lines a profound and haunting beauty. It is a cantata or a religious ballet, in parts a pageant, rather than what we mean by a play. As we have it now, music, dance, and spectacle are all gone, or, as it were, veiled; one feels them in the background behind the rhythm of the poetry. Only the words remain; and the words have, as so often in Greek things, an almost magical power of recreating the very remote past. It is just the helplessly crude myth and the primitive images on which this poem is built that make its message into something universal or eternal. It had to be re-interpreted before it "made sense" in Aeschylus' time, and it lives because it has still to be re-interpreted.

The whole history of classical Greek tragedy falls within a space of a hundred years, a short time when one thinks of the differences between the first stage and the last. The *Iphigenia in Aulis*, for example, produced soon after 406 B.C., has developed almost all the licences and ingenuities of the New Comedy. It is a good entertainment, full of variety, amusement, surprise, plot interest, and character study. The *Supplices*, produced

some time between 499 and 472 B.C., is still in the main a simple religious celebration, with no individual characters, and almost no plot. More than half of the play is lyrical—to be exact, 605 verses out of 1,070; whereas in the *Oedipus* the proportion is 317 out of 1,530. The Dramatis Personae are usually given as follows: "DANAUS; a KING OF ARGOS; a HERALD; CHORUS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF DANAUS." The list seems simple enough; but, if we look closely, we shall find that the truth is simpler still. There are really no "actors" at all, only three Choruses with their respective directors or "Exarchontes". Danaus and his Daughters—accompanied for part of the time at least by their Handmaids; the King and his Argive Soldiers; the Herald and his Swarm of Black Slaves. In a sense the more ancient type of Greek chorus has regularly two leaders: one a member of the Chorus itself, the technical Coryphaeus; and one different in character and more authoritative, the *Exarchon*. The Muses are led by one of themselves as Leader, but directed by Apollo as Exarchon. A Chorus of Bacchanals is normally led by the First Bacchanal, but directed by Dionysus. In the only two Satyr-plays that have come down to us the Chorus of Satyrs is led by the First Satyr, but also directed by Silenus, the Father of the Satyrs. Similarly the Daughters of Danaus are led by the First Daughter, but guided and directed by Danaus. I have little doubt that the Argive Soldiers in their movements were led by a First Soldier, as well as directed by the

King; the Black Slaves led by a First Black Slave, as well as directed by the Herald.

Thus the *Supplices* is extremely close—much closer than critics have suspected—to the original choric or communal dance out of which Tragedy arose. It consists in the manœuvring or interaction of three Choruses and their Leaders, and it is hardly accidental that both the Daughters of Danaus and the Sons of Aegyptus are fifty in number. The old tragic Chorus consisted of fifty (*Pollux* iv. 110). In later times it was divided among the four plays of a tetralogy into four sets of twelve *plus* two actors; but the *Supplices* apparently dates from a time when it was still undivided.

Next we may notice the purpose for which these Choruses meet. The Danaids are Suppliants; the Egyptians their persecutors; the Argives their protectors. The subject of the play is a rite of sanctuary or supplication, i.e. a ritual in which helpless and desperate people seek and find refuge at an altar. The situation forms one of the most common subjects of tragedy. Its ritual character is obvious. Suppose a particular altar or enclosure has the right of giving sanctuary, how does it make sure of preserving that right? Just as one preserves a right of way. On some particular day of the year there is a public ritual performance in which some fugitive, pursued by his enemies, flies to the altar or enclosure and is there held to be inviolable. That is, a sacred story is enacted in which the place in question was on some known occasion definitely recognized as a sanctuary. In its earliest form, I presume, both

fugitives and pursuers would be Choruses, and probably the authorities who establish the sanctuary would be a chorus, too; exactly like the *Supplices*, with its Chorus of flying Maidens, its chorus of Pursuers, and its Chorus of Argives who give protection.

On the other hand, the play has moved one step away from the original ritual. It is not performed at the original place of sanctuary, which is supposed to be a common altar of the Gods of the agora at Argos. It is played in the precinct of Dionysus at Athens. The performance has been cut loose from its roots as a ritual act, and has started on its free career as a work of art. The leaven of drama is already working; and by the time Aeschylus reaches the second play of this trilogy we find him making one of the Danaids emerge as an individual character and stand out against her sisters.

But now let us take the plot. It is a plot which would have raised a smile on the face of Sophocles or Euripides, and I think on that of Aeschylus himself in his later years.

The fifty daughters of Danaus, flying from the persecution of their cousins, the fifty sons of Aegyptus —we remember that the original circular chorus regularly numbered fifty, hence these large and symmetrical families—have fled under their father's guidance from Egypt to Argos. They choose that country because they are descended from Io, the Argive priestess, and they know by family tradition her marvellous history. Consequently, when the King of Argos

questions them, they find it easy to convince him that they are true Argives and have a claim upon his protection against their pursuers. Such protection may mean war; the King hesitates, but at last goes with Danaus to put the case before the people of Argos. Left alone, the Danaids meditate on the mystery of the dealings of Zeus with their ancestress Io, her wrongs, her suffering, and her strange deliverance. Danaus returns from the Assembly with a firm promise of assistance, but almost immediately after, from his place of watch, sees in the offing the Egyptian ship. He goes to get help, the Maidens are left alone, and the Egyptian Herald, with his horrible retinue, arrives and proceeds to hale them away. There is a wild and imaginative Dance of Flight and Pursuit, when the King appears with Danaus, saves the Maidens and defies the Herald, who departs threatening war. The Danaids are given a home in Argos; they utter a song of blessing, and are left for the moment safe, but under the shadow of war with its uncertain issue.

The *Supplices* seems to have been the first play of a tragic trilogy, *Supplices*, *Egyptians*, *Danaids*. Of the other two only fragments are extant, but it appears that in the second play the Maidens are in the power of the Egyptians. Since it is difficult to suppose that the Argive army has been conquered, we may conjecture that Danaus, to avoid a ruinous war, is practising deliberate treachery upon his enemies (cf. his conduct in this play, ll. 753 ff.). The Egyptians force the Danaids to their bed, but the Maidens, by their father's

counsel, take daggers with them and swear at all costs to save their virginity. They all keep their oath and slay their would-be violators except one, Hypermnestra, who yields herself in love to her cousin Lynkeus, and helps him to escape. In the third play Hypermnestra is brought to trial and judged, it would seem, both for perjury and unchastity, since she has broken her oath and forfeited her virginity.* Is she guilty or no? We may remember a similar situation in the *Eumenides*. There the problem of the possibility of forgiveness for the shedding of kindred blood is treated by Aeschylus as a mystery too difficult for human justice, and passed on to a tribunal presided over by the goddess Athena. Here the problem of Hypermnestra's conduct goes to a tribunal presided over by Aphrodite, the goddess of

* There is no mention of any judgement upon the other Danaids. Apparently the sympathy of the poet is still with them, as it certainly is in the present play. In later myth, of course, they are *scelestae sorores*, husband-murderers, and are represented as punished among the great sinners of Hades, being condemned to carry water in vessels with holes in them. Some scholars, such as Dieterich and Wilamowitz, have considered this fruitless labour a suitable punishment for the sin of rejecting marriage, and argued that the Danaids are meant by Aeschylus to be in the wrong throughout. Mazon takes a somewhat similar view. See the excellent answer in Vürtheim's Introduction. Apart from the fact that Aeschylus shows no knowledge of any future punishment of his heroines, the story of the water-carrying itself looks like the misinterpretation of a work of art, a common enough source of stories. We know that the Danaids were connected in Argive ritual with streams and irrigation; it was Danaus who "made dry Argos well-watered". What more natural than that the Danaids should be represented as carrying vessels from which the water ran?

love. A fragment of the judgement is preserved, asserting the influence of Aphrodite over all life:

> The Sky most holy for Earth's kiss doth cry,
> And the Earth yearns to melt into the Sky,
> Till from that heavenly lover falls the rain
> And steeps Earth's body, that she bears amain
> Grass, the flock's food, and corn, man's living bread.
> And all trees blossom, and all fruit is fed
> To fulness by that rain which maketh one.
> Whereof the cause am I.

These lines are not in themselves conclusive. But we know from other sources that Hypermnestra was acquitted, and it seems certain that the ground of her acquittal was the simple fact that she loved Lynkeus, and therefore was right to yield herself to him (cf. *Prom.* 865 ff.).

This result is so remarkable that we must consider further the poet's attitude to Supplication and to Virginity.

The first words of the play are "Zeus the Suppliant," *Ζεὺς μὲν Ἀφίκτωρ*. A Suppliant is one who confesses his helplessness, throws away all defence, and flies either to an altar or to the knees of some strong man or woman for protection; and Zeus is, of course, well known as the protector of Suppliants. Ordinary human feeling hates the idea of a wrong done to the helpless—to a blind beggar, to a sick or wounded man, to a child; and that feeling expresses itself by saying that a wrong done to these is particularly hateful to God, or that the suppliant is *ἀραῖος* or *προστροπαῖος*, "charged with the power of cursing".

That is simple enough, and the idea permeates the whole of this play, as it permeates many later tragedies. To betray the Suppliant is a sin of the worst type, "unforgivable even in the grave" (l. 416); Zeus himself marks and punishes it. But there is a further extension of the same sentiment. In some mystical sense, just as Zeus the protector of Kings is himself a King, as He to whom the bull is sacrificed is himself a bull, so the Protector of Suppliants is himself a Suppliant. Nay, it might even be argued from two doubtful passages in Aeschylus and one in Nonnus that He who forgives sinners is himself a sinner: (*ἀλάστωρ, Orphica* 733; *Aesch.* fr. 92, 194). Suffering man makes a god in his own image, a Suffering God. The idea is less unfamiliar to us than it might be, owing to the place it occupies in Christianity. Reject that helpless blind man, and in some sense you have rejected Zeus himself. The conception is hinted at several times in Greek literature, but it is always left more or less a mystery.

But what is the ground of the Danaids' supplication? From what are they seeking sanctuary? They have fled from Egypt over the sea, since their father, in a situation where every way led to grief, "deemed this the noblest grief", in order to escape from the sons of Aegyptus. If we look at other cases of formal Supplication in Greek tragedy we find, first and most frequent, people taking sanctuary to save their lives, or, it may be, the lives of their children; as in Euripides' *Heracleidae, Andromache, Heracles, Ion, Helena.* In the

Eumenides Orestes takes sanctuary with Athena, not exactly to save his life, but to save himself from the Furies. In Euripides' *Supplices* the Mothers of the Seven Chieftains slain at Thebes are suppliants to Theseus to recover their sons' dead bodies for proper mourning and burial. It is well known what a horror the ancients had of dying without—so to speak—the last rites of the Church. Death, torture, lack of funeral rites: those are three well-known and obvious horrors. The Danaids, however, are suppliant, and facing and almost inviting death in the course of their supplication, in order to avoid union—the Greek word "Gamos" has not the same legal connotations as our "marriage"—with their cousins. The nearest parallel is the *Helena*, where the heroine takes sanctuary in a tomb to preserve her chastity from a wicked king.

Now why do the Danaids object so strongly to their cousins? One's first thought is that the marriage of first cousins counted as incest, but I do not think that this explanation will hold. For one thing, in Greek literature as a whole, though there is a great deal of strong feeling on the subject of incest, as well as a good deal of philosophic scepticism, I can find no objection to the marriage of first cousins. And secondly, although the speakers in this play are constantly seeking grounds for objection to the marriage, no one actually says that it would be incestuous. (The nearest approaches to it are ll. 8—if *αὐτογενῆ* be read—and 37).

One passage seems fairly decisive on the other side. At ll. 330 ff. the King definitely asks the Leader:

"Why do you fly from your cousins? Is it because you dislike them, or do you mean that there is some sin involved?" Literally, "do you mean τὸ μὴ θέμις, 'that which is not lawful'?" And the Leader answers, not quite directly but clearly enough: "What woman would complain of a master whom she loved?" That is, she does not accept the suggestion that the marriage is "not lawful" or "forbidden". She does accept the other alternative. They hate their cousins, and therefore will die rather than marry them.

But furthermore it was a well-known rule of Attic Law that if the owner of an estate died leaving daughters but no sons, the next male of kin had a right, and even a duty, to take the family estate into his care and the heiress with it. The heiress was, so to speak, *adscripta glebae*; the duty of taking on the derelict family estate involved the duty of marrying the derelict female attached to it.* Thus the King first remarks that a marriage within the family has obvious economic advantages, since it keeps the estate together, and then raises the definite question:

> How if by law the Sons of Egypt claim,
> As next in blood, the kinsman's right on ye? (l. 387.)

The correct answer, in prose, in a Law-court, would be first, perhaps, that Attic Law did not hold in Egypt, and secondly, that since their father was still alive all

* Professor Ridgeway actually took the main subject of the play to be a conflict of two systems of law on this point.—*Cambridge Praelections*, 1906.

rights over them obviously belonged to him, and the whole plea was frivolous. The actual answer of the Chorus is a passionate cry that they will rather die than submit to the brute strength of their pursuers (l. 392).

This shows, I think, that there is no question of incest. The fact that the suitors are cousins is a point in favour of their suit rather than against it. The one conclusive and damning objection to them is the fact that the Maidens dislike them. That fact turns their suit into a persecution and the marriage into a violation. Whatever the law may or may not be, the Danaids will die rather than let their cousins get possession of them. And the King, after weighing the costs, supports them (l. 940).

Their resolution expresses itself, as it naturally would, in two ways: once or twice (ll. 143–9, 804) in what looks like a rejection of marriage in any form, a prayer to the virgin goddesses Artemis and Athena to let the Danaids preserve their virginity (cf. "the inborn shrinking" in l. 8); and, second, in a claim at least for some freedom of choice in marriage (ll. 337, 1031, 1068–9; cf. 996–1009). This is quite clear in the text and obviously true to character. A girl pressed to marry an unwelcome suitor usually says she does not wish to marry at all. Consequently I am entirely unconvinced by those scholars who regard the Danaids as committing a mortal sin by their blasphemous rejection of the Institution of Marriage. There is not a suggestion of this in the play. Again and again there

is a prayer to the gods, especially to Zeus, to regard the woman's cause, and uphold the freedom of woman to choose her mate as against man's superior strength. There is also the special appeal to Zeus as the lover of Io, the ancestress of the Danaids. Now the story of Io forms the most curious and the most intriguing element in the whole scheme of this play. It presents, as so often happens in early Greek literature, both the lowest and the highest range of thought: its very crudity and absurdity compel the poet to think, and by thinking he turns a piece of primitive folklore into a mystery, a palpable absurdity into a serious explanation of one of the riddles of human life.

Let us touch for a moment on the mythology. Io as a priestess of Hera is presumably a goddess of the same type as Hera, connected with marriage, fertility, childbirth; like most such goddesses she is connected with cows and with the moon. But the moon element in Io is unusually strong. According to the ancients themselves (Herodian, Suidas), Io was the Argive name for the Moon; hence she is horned, whether a horned woman or actually a cow; hence she is a consort of Zeus; hence she is driven across the sky for ever and ever, a hunted thing; hence she is watched by the watcher with a myriad eyes, who is, so Euripides (*Phoen.* 1116) and others tell us, the starry sky. Furthermore, when the Greeks, who knew of Io's wandering to Egypt, found the bull-calf Apis (Egyptian *Ḥapi*) worshipped there, it was easy to see in him the child of the cow-goddess Io. The Greek form of the

name Ḥapi, "Epaphus," seemed to mean "touch" or "touching", and thus fitted in with the story of a virgin birth through the touch of the hand of Zeus.

The first song of the Danaid Chorus when they reach Argos is full of mysterious hints about Epaphus, son of Io, and the secret which they are going to reveal at the proper moment to the Lords of Argos. For the story of Io is a ἱερὸς λόγος, a holy tale with a secret meaning, not known to the vulgar. It would be known perhaps to the King, the Priestess of Hera, and Io's own family. Such "holy tales" were, of course, a well-known fact in many communities. We have a good example of the way in which they might be used in the scene where the strange women have to convince the King of their identity. The King asks their name and race; they say they are true Argives, and prove their descent by showing their knowledge of all that happened to Io in Argos, and adding further facts about her adventures in Egypt (ll. 291–324).

So far so good. The Suppliant Women's relation to Io gives them a footing in Argive society. But if we look deeper the story of Io causes a great difficulty. The Danaids are being pursued by their unwelcome lovers; they fly over the seas and face death in order to escape; they appeal to Zeus to be their protector and deliverer, and they base their appeal on the memory of Io. But the trouble is that, if the ordinary myth is to be taken at its face value, Zeus acted to Io almost exactly as the sons of Aegyptus are acting towards the Danaids. In more senses than one the Danaids "wander in the

print of ancient feet". The matter is stated plainly in the *Promêtheus*, in which the gadfly-driven Io actually appears and tells Prometheus her story: the dreams that came to her of the love of Zeus; the oracle that commanded her father to drive her out from his house so that Zeus might more easily possess her; then the maddening distortion that fell upon her shape and her mind, the gadfly and the infinite tortured wandering Prometheus in his answer turns to the Chorus: "How think ye? Is not the monarch of the gods a tyrant everywhere? God as he is, he lusted to enjoy this mortal woman, and for that has cast upon her these afflictions. A cruel suitor is thine, O Damsel!" (*Promêtheus*, ll. 735–740). And to make the parallel more complete Io seeks death rather than violation, just as the Danaids do. Her only comfort is the knowledge that Zeus will some day be cast out from his throne, unless, indeed, Prometheus forgives and saves him. As a matter of fact we know that, in the last play of the Prometheus trilogy, Zeus and Prometheus were reconciled. Zeus, who has the special power of learning by suffering, has suffered and therefore learnt. He has learnt wisdom, and, as a part of wisdom, mercy; he has forgiven and set free his enemies. And with such a Monarch of Heaven Prometheus, and doubtless Io too, can be reconciled.

It is always rash to suppose that an ancient writer, especially a poet, is expressing original views of his own on any religious or philosophical subject; ancient poets normally express the current *Logos* in one of its

forms. But one can sometimes feel individual character in the mode of expression. So here. I cannot but feel that Aeschylus has thought and felt deeply over the contradictions involved in this story and this situation. Such contradictions are common in all religious tradition, but particularly common in Greek legend. Some innocent local myth of the descent of the local chief from the local god and a cow- or moon-consort begins to go wrong when the local god is identified with Zeus, who has already his wife Hera; then it becomes totally intolerable when the Zeus of mythology gradually develops in men's minds into the One God or Supreme Being of Greek philosophy. It was not possible for Aeschylus to solve his problem on these historical and sceptical lines; so he attempts it, first, by deepening all the issues of the story: that takes us a long way towards a satisfactory solution; and secondly, if that is not enough, by his special doctrine of Learning by Suffering. Zeus won the throne of Heaven by violence and war, as the previous Kings of Heaven had won it; but whereas they, when they suffered, merely struck back till they were beaten, Zeus had his great secret, the power to learn. I have written about this elsewhere.*

To understand what I mean by deepening the issues, I would ask the reader to study carefully the chief Io Chorus (ll. 524–598), in which Aeschylus seems to have expressed some of his profoundest

* *Rise of the Greek Epic*, Edn. 3, Chapter X; *Oresteia*, Introduction.

feelings. No analysis—and, I fear, no translation—can do justice to the beauty of this wonderful religious poem, but its meaning may be made more clear by two or three comments. In the first place, Zeus is not the mere libertine described by Prometheus. The birth of Epaphus is a virgin birth, due to the laying on of hands and some reception of the "breath" or "true word" of Zeus. As in similar stories of miraculous births, there is here an element of mystery. Not all is explained; but at least the gross form of the myth is utterly denied. The purpose of Zeus in thus afflicting Io with torment and wandering is not lust; it is a purpose inscrutable. The suffering of Io is not in the least minimized: quite the reverse. But we are somehow intended to feel that Io's misery, like that of Orestes, was all a means to a blessed end, and presumably that the end could not have been reached otherwise.

Is there some allegory about the whole story? I do not like to be positive, but allegory was all through Greek history a fairly common method of explaining mythological difficulties. And it is difficult, without allegory, to understand the rôle of Hera in the story as now told. The torment is now her work; Zeus is the Deliverer. And Io is actually described as *θυιὰς Ἥρας*, the mad or inspired votaress of Hera, who causes her torment as, for example, Apollo causes that of Cassandra, or Dionysus that of a Maenad. This Hera can hardly be merely the Hera of mythology, jealous of her husband's amours, because there are no

amours. We may perhaps remember that Hera is, beyond all else, the goddess of marriage or Gamos. Is it Gamos—or as we should say, sex—which, at least until its conditions are right, causes the torment? In any case I cannot help seeing in the Io Chorus the same doctrine that is apparently enunciated by Aphrodite at the end of the trilogy. The Danaids prize above all things their virginity; they will die or slay rather than submit to their pursuers. They are right. But one of them, Hypermnestra, breaks her oath and does submit; she is judged by a divine tribunal and the judgement is that she, too, is right. She is right because she loved her suitor. By that fact, and that alone, the *γάμος* is justified. The violation is transformed into a sacrament. Since virginity is an impossible ideal for the race; and since the whole drama is set in an atmosphere in which virginity is a sacred thing, dearer than life itself, this is the only kind of solution possible.

Similarly, if Io is said again and again to represent "the woman's cause", and if the Danaids are born of Io, with all her wrong, her agony, and her love, I think it is on these lines that the words must be understood. Virginity must be violated: that is the wrong; woman must go through the pangs of child-birth: that is the agony; yet there is something which according to Aeschylus atones, or more than atones, for both: that is the love.

There is no difficulty about the main action of the play: that is, the arrival of the Egyptian Herald, the

pursuit and flight of the Maidens, and their rescue by the King. But when the Herald has retired, baffled and breathing wrath, Danaus gives his last directions to his daughters. They culminate in a passionate and beautiful exhortation to do what they have been doing all the time, to preserve and prize their virginity. They carry with them something that is precious and will be coveted. It is like the bloom of a flower or fruit; wild beasts pursue it, and mortal men, and fierce things that fly and that crawl. Let them not, at the last, lose that for which they have endured much travail and crossed perilous seas.

I can see that some scholars will criticize my interpretation of this very primitive tragedy as being made up of modern ideas, but I hope for better treatment from anthropologists. All sanctities are difficult to justify on purely common-sense grounds. To send the women and children first to the boats, to abstain from hitting a man when he is down, to fight to the death rather than accept certain forms of dishonour, principles ingrained in our Western tradition of chivalry, are not perhaps much more rational than those which we regard as extravagant in Japanese *bushido*, or as laughable in a Red Indian's avoidance of his mother-in-law. But it does seem as if no man and no race of men ever came to much good unless there were some things which they held more precious than life. Now the prizing of virginity, or of that mysterious thing chastity, as something of inestimable value, is extremely ancient in Aryan and Semitic lands; indeed,

it is more characteristically ancient than modern because, in disturbed societies the violation of women is a live danger, and the resistance to it not a sentiment but a live problem. Greek mythology is full of heroines who die to save their honour, or because they have lost it, and of men stoned to death or haunted by avenging ghosts because they have violated virgins. The ancient imagination was not less preoccupied than the modern by these problems and taboos of sex, but, if anything, more so. And the need somehow to combine the sacredness of virginity with the acceptance of marriage was, of course, just as absolute then as now. Dozens of elements in ancient Greek rituals are extant to prove it (see Frazer, *Psyche's Task*, *passim*).

What is much more remarkable in the *Supplices* is the attempt to find for this problem a purely spiritual or psychological answer, not one based on any external ritual. The conventional solution, in ancient times as in modern, was, of course, to insist on the correct nuptial rites. A *Gamos* without the correct marriage service was wrong, dangerous, and likely to upset the harvest; with the correct marriage service it was right and beneficial. Aeschylus might have ended his play with a speech from Hera, the goddess of legal marriage, and all would have been plain. But he chose to go deeper, and make the problem depend not on any mere ritual, but on love.

As far as the present play goes—and the rest of the trilogy seems to confirm it—we find only the principle

that virginity is more precious than life; that violation, *γάμος βίαιος*, is an indelible infamy: "Not even in Hades, after death, can the doer of such a deed be purified" (l. 227). A *γάμος ἑκούσιος*, on the other hand, the same act as a willing expression of love, has its *Moira*, its due place in the divine scheme. It would be interesting to know if in the last play of the trilogy the Danaids make any formal recantation of their "inborn shrinking": but the evidence fails us.

It is an interesting confirmation of this view that exactly the same problem and the same solution were put forward by Aeschylus in a play which treated of the story of one of these same daughters of Danaus, Amymône. The *Amymône* was a satyr-play, and may well have been actually the satyr-play which closed this trilogy. In it the heroine is pursued by a satyr and rescued by Poseidon, who, after routing the would-be violator, reveals himself as her fate-ordained lover and is accepted ("Thou art ordained by fate to be mine, and I to wed thee").

In the last scene of the present play the Handmaids remind their mistresses of the greatness of Aphrodite:

> For of Her comes the dumb heart that longeth,
> And the soft word that fails not, though afraid;
> And the music of the world to her belongeth,
> And the whisper of a man with a maid.

The Danaids themselves implicitly accept her power when they pray that she will not let their *Gamos* come by violence, and in their last song definitely accept "the twofold life", so long as it is combined with

freedom of choice. It is the same doctrine as that enunciated by Aphrodite in her final judgement at the end of the trilogy, when she ordains the solemn rite of marriage based upon love.

That, then, is what this very ancient play, so far as I can understand it, explicitly says. Critics have been unwilling to admit such a conclusion. They will say it is like the language of the romantic revival at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and no doubt it is. After all, the romantic tradition has its roots in the history of mankind. It descends from the Greeks, like almost all the rest of our poetical convention. Again and again we find that the thing which is conventional sentiment among us was genuine and practical conviction with them. People then did the things which we now consider it poetical to imagine. I cannot resist the conclusion that we have in the *Supplices* an expression of the real conflict of emotions, practical, serious, and passionate, from which this part of our romantic tradition is descended. But this raises a historical question too large to be treated here.

THE SUPPLIANT WOMEN OR SUPPLICES OF AESCHYLUS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DANAUS, *with a* CHORUS *of* DANAIDS, *and their* HANDMAIDS
PELASGUS, *King of Argos, with a* CHORUS *of* ARGIVE MEN
HERALD, *with a* CHORUS *of* EGYPTIAN SLAVES
LEADER *of the* CHORUS *of* DANAIDS

[The names Danäus, Danäid have three syllables, the accent being on the first *Dan–*.

The title *Supplices* also has three syllables, with the accent on the first.]

The SUPPLICES *is the earliest of extant Greek Tragedies.* *See Notes, p.* 92.

THE SUPPLICES

There is no stage, only a large circular Orchestra, or Dancing Ground, in the centre of which—or perhaps at the back—rises a Sacred Hill surmounted by a Common Altar, with figures or emblems representing all the chief Gods of Argos.

Enter the Chorus of fifty DANAIDS *led by their Father,* DANAUS.

CHORUS.

MAY Zeus, the Eternal Suppliant, smile
In mercy on this suppliant band
Sea-lifted from the slender sand
That masks the mouths of Nile;
Outcast from that diviner land,
By Syrian gardens fringed, we fly
In exile, not with tainted hand
Nor by our city doomed to die:
A shrinking of the flesh inborn
From man's touch, from the lust and scorn
Of dark Aegyptus' sons, to shame
Hath cast us. For the King our sire,
Who leads our thought, who guides our choir,
'Mid all the mazes of a game
Where grief in every move must lie,
Deemed this the noblest grief: to fly
O'erseas, forsaking all, and find
That Argos where began, 'tis said,
The many wonders of our kind,

The Hand of Peace on one who fled
With tortured flesh, with hornèd head,
  The life by God's breath poured.
Where should I seek a dearer city,
Armed with these olive-boughs of pity,
  The suppliant's only sword?
O walls, O soil, O gleaming sea,
O gods of heaven above, and ye
Heroes beneath the ground, who hold
Your honoured graves, our fathers old;
And Zeus, O Zeus of the Third Day,
The Saviour, thou who holdest guard
Of good men's houses, be not hard,
But from the land's deep bosom send
A wind of mercy to befriend
Women who suffer and who pray!
And thrust the Egyptian back—Oh, thrust
Proud man and man's outswarming lust
Back to the tempest reeling, there
'Mid storm and fire and thunder-blare
To meet the wrath of the great Sea
And perish, ere by some false mesh
Of law from this rejecting flesh
They seize the love that may not be!

[*They take position for the Dance.* DANAUS *seats himself on the steps of the Great Altar.*

CHORUS.

(*They speak in riddles, calling upon Epaphus, son of Io their ancestress, identified with the Egyptian Apis, son of Isis.*)

[*Strophe* 1

I call upon One far away
Over deep seas, our Help heavenborn:
A babe among blossoms he lay,
Hornèd child of the Maid of the Horn,
Our Mother: of her was he born
And begotten by God's pure breath.
And the name of him ever for us
To the God's touch witnesseth,
For the babe was Epaphus.

[*Antistrophe* 1

I have called him, and, roaming again
In the flowery places, the fold
Where our Mother roamed in her pain,
I muse on the sorrows of old.
I will show to the princes who hold
Her meadows a sign ere the night;
Yea, things undreamed shall appear,
And a great word be spoken aright,
When the hour in its fulness is here.

(*Pursued and shut out from home, they mourn for ancient sorrows, like the Nightingale:*)

[*Strophe* 2

If one of the bird-seer's art
Should hear in the waste our crying,
A thought will well in his heart
Of Tereus' bride, the undying,
The piteous, the unforgiven
Nightingale falcon-driven.

[*Antistrophe* 2

She is shut out from river and meadow;
There are tears in her old sunny places;
And weeping far off in the shadow
The sorrow of old she retraces,
Tells of the child she slew
And the mother's heart untrue.

[*Strophe* 3

Through me too sorrow runs
Like a strange Ionian song;
I rend a cheek that is warm with the suns
Of Egypt, and tender with benisons,
A heart unschooled by wrong.
I gather flowers and weave
A garland of thoughts that grieve;
For in dread of my kin, my own,
Away from the shore I flee,
Away to the mist, where none
Shall care for me.

[*They turn to the Great Altar and address the Gods in prayer.*

[*Antistrophe* 3

Give not the strength of youth
A portion beyond the laws,
Nor let man's pride be above God's ruth:
Gods of our race, turn to the truth
Your eyes, and hear our cause!

Only by loathing lust
Can ye to love be just.
A very shield in war
To them that in sorrow sit
Is an altar, and God's great star
Is over it.

(They speak of Zeus, the Inscrutable.)

[*Strophe* 4

Oh, may the desire of God be indeed of God!
Is it not strong in the chase?
On all roads with dark issue, a burning rod,
It guides man's mortal race.

[*Antistrophe* 4

It falleth firm, it slippeth not, whatso thought
In the brain of Zeus is formed: it is thought and deed.
Through tangled forest and shadow his paths are wrought,
Which none may trace nor read.

[*Strophe* 5

From the high towers of hope on which they stand
He casts men down; they perish utterly.
Yet he takes no sword, he lifts no violent hand.
Effortless all must be
That is of God. All things
Whereon his thought may light
Moveless to pass he brings
There on the height.

[*Antistrophe* 5

Let him look now on this ungodliness
Of man: it groweth strong as a green tree
In hearts unchanging-hard, hot to possess
This loveless flesh of me.
In dreams infatuate
To its own wound it cleaves,
Till it learn, all too late,
That sin deceives.

[*They turn again in prayer to Earth:*

Some Women. [*Strophe* 6

As I speak there comes a crying
From within that checks my breath:
Tis a music full of tears
For some terror that it hears,
As a dirge over the dying;
For this life I count as death.

All.

Be ours, O bosomed Earth,
Earth o'er the sea!
No tongue of thine own birth
Is strange to thee.
Thou hear'st us, Earth, our friend!
Or, where words fail,
I beat my breast, and rend
This Tyrian veil.

SOME WOMEN. [*Antistrophe* 6

Yet a full joy on the morrow
By the turning of God's hand,
May yet find us, night or day,
So but death be kept away!
Oh, the mystery of sorrow!
The wave bears us—to what land?

ALL.

Be ours, O bosomed Earth,
Earth o'er the sea!
No tongue of thine own birth
Is strange to thee.
Thou hear'st us, Earth, our friend:
Or, where words fail,
I beat my breast, and rend
This Tyrian veil

[*Strophe* 7

The driven oar, the flaxen gear,
A tower full-orbed against the brine,
Have borne me un-stormconquered here:
I blame not nor repine:
Only the end, the end,
Father All-seeing, send
Gentle to me and mine!

ALL. [*to Epaphus:*

Great seed of the Untamed Mother, hark to me!
Hear my word spoken!

From the arms of the defiler keep me free,
Unwed, unbroken!

[*Antistrophe* 7

[*To Artemis, or Athena*

Thou of the Portal high,
Rock-built immutably,
My will in thine doth lie:
God's daughter, look on me!
Set thy protecting wrath
Across our hunters' path;
Oh, tameless even as I,
Virgin, our saviour be!

ALL.

Great seed of the Untamed Mother, hark to me!
Hear my word spoken!
From the arms of the defiler keep me free,
Unwed, unbroken!

[*Strophe* 8

[*To Zeus again*

Else . . . dark our cheek doth glow;
Dark in the burning sun:
Earth knows a Zeus below,
Dark, who rejecteth none.
We know his strangling knot;
To him with suppliant breath,
If heaven will hearken not,
We turn for peace, for death.

ALL.

Ah, Zeus, alas for Io! The wrath above
Forgetteth naught. It searcheth the ways of the worm.
O ye that have conquered heaven, I know the love
Ye show unto men, and the bitter end thereof:
The great wind, the cold storm.

[*Antistrophe* 8

Then shall of Zeus indeed
A tale of shame be told,
Who helped not in his need
The Child of Her of old,
The Hornèd Child, returned
To thy land and his own:
Oh, let him not lie spurned
Before thy throne.

ALL.

Ah, Zeus, alas for Io! The wrath above
Forgetteth naught. It searcheth the ways of the worm.
O ye that have conquered heaven, I know the love
Ye show unto men, and the bitter end thereof:
The great wind, the cold storm.

DANAUS.

Bethink ye now, my children. By the thought
Of this old trusty pilot ye have wrought

Your voyage, and now on shore I charge ye bind
With counsel new the tablets of your mind.
I see that voiceless herald that doth speak
Of armies, dust: I hear the axles' creak;
And lo, a regiment under spear and shield,
With horses at the flank and chariots wheeled!
Methinks some Argive chief hath learnt from spies
Your coming, and would see with his own eyes.
But be it with good intent, or be it hard
With savage wrath he marcheth hitherward,
Both ways 'twere wiser, Maidens, here beside
The altars of the Gathered Gods to abide,
Kneeling. An altar is a flawless shield,
More true than any wall. Go near, and wield
In your left hands the olive-branch with wool
White-wreathèd, pledge of Zeus the Merciful.
And let your words be gentle, close to tears
And full of need, as fitteth sojourners
In a strange land, revealing earnestly
How guiltless from your fatherland ye flee.
Your voice be free from boldness, your calm eyes,
In chastened front, far from all vanities.
Your converse not too forward, nor too hot
To entice men's eyes. Such graces like me not.
Remember to give way. Ye have here nor gold
Nor home nor kin. Let not the weak be bold.

[*He seats himself on the Altar Steps.*

LEADER.

Father, thy thought well answereth to the thought
Within me. I will keep thy charges, fraught
With wisdom. May but Zeus our grandsire see!

DANAUS.

Yea, surely: and with eyes of charity!

LEADER.

I fain would make my seat beside thine own.

DANAUS.

Delay not till the altar stair be won.

[*They come to the steps of the Great Altar, and see the emblems of various gods.*

LEADER.

Zeus, pity our sorrows, and we perish not.

DANAUS.

If He but will, all grief shall be forgot.

LEADER.

We are with thee. Teach us now this people's use.

DANAUS.

Lift first your voices to the Bird of Zeus.

LEADER.

I hail the eagle Sun's all-seeing eye.

DANAUS.

And pure Apollo, exiled from the sky.

LEADER.

He knoweth exile, he can feel for man.

DANAUS.

Ah! Let him feel for us, if feel he can!

LEADER.

Whom shall I pray to next, of all this line?

DANAUS.

I see the Trident here, Poseidon's sign.

LEADER.

Our guide at sea: may he befriend us still!

DANAUS.

Lo, a strange Hermes, shaped as Hellenes will.

LEADER.

O Herald, speak the word that we are free!

DANAUS.

Now worship this whole altar-company
Of gods, and cower the holy place within,
Like doves in terror from your falcon kin:
Oh, kin of hate, who would defile our blood!
Shall bird be clean, that maketh bird his food?

Shall man be clean, who doth his lust fulfil,
Against her will, against her father's will,
On woman? Never more shall such an one,
Nay, not in death, escape the deed he has done.
A Zeus is there, not ours, on each bowed head
Who deals the unchanging judgement of the dead.
Watch, therefore, and, when questioned, keep the laws
I have shown you, that this day may speed our cause.

[*Enter the* KING *with the Argive host.*

KING.

What company in all un-Greek array,
Rich with barbarian robes and coifing gay,
Awaits us here? For, sure, not Argolis,
Not Hellas knows such woman's garb as this.
And hither fearless, by no herald cried,
Ye come, none to receive you, none to guide;
At this I marvel. Yet your olive-wands,
With white bewreathèd by well-witting hands,
I see before the Gods of Gathering thrown.
In none save Hellene lands that rite is known.
And many another sign I well might seek,
But here ye stand, nor lack a voice to speak.

LEADER.

Touching the garb we wear, thy word is true.—
But first, how should we name thee as is due?
A citizen? Or is the watchful wand
Of Hermes thine? Or lordship of the land?

KING.

For that, speak on, and answer fearlessly.
Earthborn Palaichthon was my sire, and I
Pelasgus, of these regions lord and king.
Whence a great race, duly inheriting
Their leader's name, Pelasgian, taketh due
Of all this soil. Yea, all the lands wherethrough
Pure Strymon floweth are mine own, away
To the sinking sun. The limits of my sway
Perrhaebia marketh, and the further side
Of Pindus, near the Paiones; then wide
Dodona's mountains; and, beyond, the cool
Dividing sea. Within those bounds I rule.
This land on which we tread of old did take
The name of Apia for its healer's sake,
Apis, who, crossing from Naupactus—son
Of Phoebus he, healer and priest in one—
Did cleanse the land of evil things and wild,
Which Earth, by ancient deeds of blood defiled,
Sent up to ease her fury, swarms of grim
Serpents, which dwelt with man and hated him.
Of these a swift and all-delivering purge
Wrought Apis. In all Argos none could urge
Failure or fault; for which good work he bears
No guerdon save a memory in our prayers.
Ye know me now; speak plainly—for no grace
Of fine words moves our folk—your name and race.

LEADER.

Brief is our tale and clear. Of Argive breed
We spring, a hornèd mother's high-born seed.
Hereof sure warrant ask, and I will give.

KING.

I hear your words, strange damsels, but believe
I cannot, that our blood is in your veins.
More like the rovers of the Libyan plains
Than Greek women are ye. Or by the flow
Of ancient Nile, methinks, such flowers may grow.
And Cyprus hath its type, on woman's mould
Impressed by male artificers of old;
And tales I know, how Indian women roam,
By camels drawn, each in her tented home,
Beyond the wallèd Ethiop, in waste lands.
Nay, were there bows and arrows in your hands,
As Amazons had I your lineage read,
The flesh-devourers, the unhusbanded.
Teach me this mystery, Maidens, till I see
How that of Argive race and blood ye be.

LEADER.

(She proves her descent by showing that she knows the secret story of Io.)

Men say that Io once of Hera's dome
Was key-bearer, in this her Argive home.

KING *(surprised).*

'Tis a true tale; and wide the fame thereof . . .
And can it be that Zeus felt mortal love?

LEADER.

Not hid from Hera were those secret hours.

KING.

What end came to that strife of heavenly powers?

LEADER.

To a hornèd heifer Hera changed the maid.

KING.

And Zeus that hornèd one so fair betrayed?

LEADER.

Never! Himself took bull-form for her sake.

KING.

What answer, then, did Jove's dread consort make?

LEADER.

Set her all-seeing watcher o'er that cow

KING.

What myriad-eyed kine-warden meanest thou?

LEADER.

Argos, whom Hermes slew, Earth's marvellous son.

KING.

What next befell that sad, that hornèd one?

LEADER.

A fiery goad, which spurred her, blind with fear . . .

KING.

Oistros they name it in the meadows here.

LEADER.

And drove her from the land, long leagues of way.

KING (*reflecting*).

Ye tell our own tale.—All was as ye say.

LEADER.

Then to Canôpus, then to Memphis shore
She came, till Jove's hand touched her, and she bore . . .

KING.

Of god and beast, what birth unknown before?

LEADER.

Epaphus she called him, from that saving hand.

KING.

And what was Epaphus' issue in the land?

LEADER.

Libya, who reapeth the world's widest plain.

KING.

And what new life from Libya bloomed again?

LEADER.

Two-childed Bêlus, sire of this my sire.

KING.

His gracious name to know were my desire.

LEADER.

Danaus; his brother, fifty-childed too . . .

KING.

His name? Fear not to tell thy story through.

LEADER.

Aegyptus.—Now ye know mine ancestries,
Oh, lift thine Argive suppliants from their knees.
[*She kneels: the* KING *raises her.*

KING.

'Tis well. Ye have convinced me that ye share
Our blood and race. But say, how did ye dare
To fly your father's home? What thing befell?

LEADER.

Lord of Pelasgia, strange and variable
Is sorrow, never twice of the same wing.
Who could have thought or dreamed so dire a thing,
That our own kin, our cousins born, should drive
This band to Argos, lost and fugitive,
In fear of dark arms and a loathèd bed?

KING.

What fear, then, with white wands new-garlanded,
Leads ye before our Gathered Gods to fall?

LEADER.

To Egypt's sons I never will be thrall!

KING.

'Tis hate, or fear of sin, your spirit moves?

LEADER.

Doth woman dread the yoke of one she loves?

KING.

To wed your kin—to both 'twould bring increase.

LEADER.

And from our troubling give you quick release!

KING.

I seek not that. . . . What would ye I should do?

LEADER.

When Egypt claims, stand by us and be true!

KING.

A hard task! Is it war ye needs must bring?

LEADER.

Justice forsaketh not her friends, O King.

KING.

Aye, not if from the first her cause was theirs.

LEADER.

Your city's helm is wreathèd with our prayers!

KING.

I see those shadowy altars palm-bestrowed.

LEADER.

Dire is the anger of the Suppliants' God.

CHORUS. [*Strophe* 1

Pelasgian king, O child of Earth, give ear!
Pity one sore afraid,
Who prays thee, in flight surrounded, as in rude
Untrodden rocks some heifer, wolf-pursued,
Lows to the herdsman in her extreme fear,
Sure of his strength to aid.

KING.

I see our Gathering Gods enshadowed all
With prayer: they sway, with new-cut branches fraught.
God grant this stranger's parleying may not fall
To ill, nor out of things unhoped, unsought,
Our City suffer. Strife she needeth not.

CHORUS. [*Antistrophe* 1

Thou ancient law of pity, that bindest Heaven,
This crimeless exile see!
The God who ordereth Fate must yet know ruth.
Wise King and aged, hearken to our youth;
Regard the suppliant and thine offerings given
In God's house blest shall be.

KING.

Not on my hearthstone do ye plant your prayer,
Nor need I tremble. If some general stain
Be near my city, 'tis my people's care.
For me, I plight no promise; it were vain
To answer till my people's will be plain.

CHORUS. [*Strophe* 2

Thou art the City, thine the people's deed,
A judge no law hems in;
Thy nod doth move the central altar-stone
That is the City's hearth; thy staff alone
Decrees the City's act, fulfills her need.
O king, beware of sin!

KING.

Not on my head but on mine enemies'
Be sin! How can I help ye without harm
To Argos; yet how spurn such prayers as these?
Howe'er I turn, doubt holds me and alarm—
To accept, reject, or wait on Fortune's arm.

CHORUS. [*Antistrophe* 2

Raise up thine eyes to the great Judge on high,
Guardian of suffering men
Who have knelt to man and been sent empty away!
The wrath of Zeus the Suppliant bides his day
'Gainst them whose bosoms melt not at the cry
Of wronged souls in their pain.

KING.

How if by law the Sons of Egypt claim,
As next in blood, the kinsman's rights on ye?
Who shall withstand them or deny that name?
By your own laws ye needs must shape your plea
That o'er your flesh they own no mastery.

CHORUS. [*Strophe* 3

I will not suffer, like a hawk-torn bird,
The brute strength of the male!
Better fly on, yea fly to the abyss
Of stars, to save me from that loathèd kiss!
Choose thou the right, O King, and by thy word
Let fear of God prevail!

KING.

Make me not judge! The judgement is too hard.
Without my folk, I warn thee once again,
I speak not—though in power I be not barred—
Lest, if the end be evil, men complain:
"For strangers' love thou hast thy people slain."

CHORUS. [*Antistrophe* 3

Kinsman to both, Zeus who upholds the scale,
On both now turns his sight,
And, watching, to the ungodly his offence
He reckons, to the just his innocence:
The scales are true; how then can after-bale
Follow the deed of right?

KING.

Now, like a diver plunging to the deep,
I need some saving thought; I need to keep
A seeing eye, not wild or flushed with wine,
If first to Argos, then to me and mine,
This whole emprise may without peril end;
Lest either war his hot reprisals send
To spoil our fields, or by betraying you
Who cleave to our gods' altars, suppliants true,
I waken some destroying Wrath, to dwell
For ever on my hearth—some power of Hell
From whom is no release, not in the grave.
Have we not dire need of the thoughts that save?

CHORUS (*kneeling to the* KING).

Think, then! For thy thought, O Friend,
Needs must save me and defend.
Not in thee is our undoing—
Suppliant, at our journey's end,
And the hate of Hell pursuing!

Shall they drag me from thy stair
And the great gods thronèd there?
In thy hand is all the City;
Know man's vileness, and beware!
There is anger in God's pity.

Shall I kneel to thee in vain?
Wilt thou see me torn amain
From God's image? Shall they hale me
Like a horse dragged by the mane?
Shall they rend the robes that veil me?

Lo, the deed thy hand hath done
Shall not end with thee alone;
Child and house in dateless title
Hold it from thee and atone!
'Tis God's law and just requital.

KING.

I have thought enough.—Here I must haul to land
My wavering barque, with war—upon one hand
Or the other—sure! The great bolts hold her hull,
And up the beach the windlass-cables pull;
But who can ground her safe on such a shore?
If a man's house be pillaged of its store
New gain, by God's will, may supplant the old,
And freight all loss surpassing fill his hold.

Or if his tongue shoots out some dangerous word
Till hearts be wounded and men's anger stirred,
The wound that speech hath stricken speech can heal.
But kindred blood . . . I charge ye, damsels, kneel
In prayer and sacrifice ere that be shed!
Let many a questioning embassy be sped
To many a god to avert it; or count me
A man most ignorant! Which verily
I would I were, of things so miserable!
I pray, but hope not, that the end be well.

LEADER.

Hear now the last word of our piteous prayer.

KING.

Say on. I listen. Ye have all my care.

LEADER.

Thou seest this twinéd zone below my breast?

KING.

Surely; 'tis suited to a woman's vest.

LEADER.

A goodly weapon can of these be wrought.

KING.

For what? What dark word trembles in thy thought?

LEADER.

Unless thou grant some pledge that cannot fail . . .

KING.

How then? To what end shall your zones avail?

LEADER.

These altars with strange sacrifice to bind.

KING.

Thy words are riddles. Plainlier show thy mind.

LEADER.

On these gods we will hang ourselves and die!

KING.

Not that! It stabs my heart like agony.

LEADER.

Thou knowest all. I have given our purpose eyes.

KING.

'Fore God, in many shapes this peril cries
Against us. 'Tis a shoreless river, poured
In flood, a waste of waters without ford
Or sounding, where I stand and searching see
No refuge. If I fail to succour ye,
A deed thou threatenest which for sin and stain
Passeth all arrows' flight; and if again
Against your kin, Aegyptus' sons, I stand
Before my walls and battle hand to hand,
A bitter waste of life were that, to make
Strong men to bite the dust for women's sake.

Yet come what may, I must the wrath revere
Of Zeus the Suppliant: 'tis man's highest fear.
O aged Father of this maiden crew,
Take in thine arm these branches, and pursue
Thy way through all the altars of the land,
Outspreading them, that folk may understand
Your needs here by that suppliant altar-gift.
But speak no word of me. My folk are swift
To blame their prince. The sight of these may stir
Pity and wrath against the ravisher,
And thus the people's will toward you be bowed
All hearts are for the lowly against the proud.

DANAUS.

'Tis beyond treasure, to be granted thus
In exile a protector bounteous.
But with us send companions, guides to show
The country's secret ways, that we may know
What gods possess the City, and where lie
The temple-fronting altars and the high
Enwreathèd solitary thrones, that so
Safety be ours as through the streets we go:
For alien is the garb and face of us,
And Nile bears other fruit than Inachus.
Aye, hope too confident makes way for pain,
And man in blindness hath his brother slain.

KING.

Go show him—for the stranger reasoneth well—
All altars where the Gods of Argos dwell.

Greet no man as ye pass, but silently
Guide to his goal this rover of the sea.

[*Exit* DANAUS *with* GUIDES.

LEADER.

Thou speakest and he goes. Be it even thus.
But we? What comfort wilt thou make for us?

KING.

Yield up these branches, sign of sorrows past.

LEADER.

Take them; thy promise and thine hand shall last.

KING.

Then roam at will through all this level grove.

LEADER.

What safety that? Here any beast may rove.

KING.

We will not yield thee up to birds of prey!

LEADER.

To direr than a serpent's hate ye may.

KING.

Why such ill words, when ours to thee are kind?

LEADER.

Forgive me; 'tis the terror in my mind.

KING.

Kings have no part in terror. Tremble not

LEADER.

Oh, comfort me with word and deed and thought!

KING.

Be sure your father will not leave you long.
I go to call my people to the throng
Of counsel, soften their stern hearts and seek
To show thy father the right words to speak.
Remain then, and with prayer and song implore
Our gods to grant the thing thou cravest for,
While I go forth to further our great quest.
Persuasion sweet be ours, and Fortune blest!

[*Exit* KING.

[*The* DANAIDS *meditate on the mystery of the dealings of Zeus with Io, her wrongs and her deliverance.*

CHORUS. [*Strophe* 1

O King of Kings,
Blest beyond all things blest,
Of perfect things
In power the perfectest,

Hear in thy bliss,
Our prayer, and let it be!
Keep from us this
That is abhorred by thee,
The lust of man; Oh, dead beneath the dark
Blue water sink that black and evil barque!

[*Antistrophe* 1

To woman turn thine eye,
Regard us here:
The children's child am I
Of her once dear;
Remember; understand
Dear thoughts long dead,
Thou who didst lay thine hand
On Io's head!
From her who once was thine, O Zeus, we come,
Lost children, seeking Argos and our home.

[*Strophe* 2

I wander in the print of ancient feet:
'Mid these same blossoms haunted Io grazed;
From this same pasture sweet
She fled, by pain made fleet,
Through many tribes of men, with mind amazed,
Till all the fronting world she clove in twain,
And left deep-scored her pathway o'er the main.

[*Antistrophe* 2

On, on through Asia, flying vainly fast,
Through Phrygian sheepfolds, Mysia's royal keep,

Through Lydian vales she passed;
On over mountains vast
  Cilician and Pamphylian, on by deep
Rivers that fail not, gold far hid from sight,
And corn-rich isles beloved of Aphrodite.

[*Strophe* 3

On, on—and by that wingèd herdsman's blow
  Ever her heart was torn—
To God's great garden, fed by distant snow,
  Where bloom all flowers and corn;
There Typhon burns, there floodeth Nile's soft flow
Untouched by sickness: there must Io go,
  Mad with long shame and scorn,
Witness to Hera's greatness, and a cry
Of torment on her lips like prophecy.

[*Antistrophe* 3

Mortals in that day dwelling in the land,
  Their hearts shook inwardly,
Seeing a sight they might not understand:
  In pale fear every eye,
Gazed on a Being agonized, half-human,
Some part a tortured beast and some part woman:
  Behold a mystery!
By whose word at the last was comfort given
To Io wounded, wandering, gadfly-driven?

[*Strophe* 4

Thou, Zeus, from everlasting ages Lord,
Didst set her free;
By thine unwounding strength, thy breath in-poured,
Wrath ceased to be;
In a last tenderness of tears her shame
Flowed forth to die:
She took into her body the great Name,
The word that cannot lie,
And bore a babe most flawless, without blame,

[*Antistrophe* 4

Through ages long perfect in happiness.
Wherefore all Earth
Lifteth her voice to praise the Father, and bless
The supreme birth.
This is the deed of Zeus, all deeds above.
Who else but He
Could tear the web of hate that Hera wove?
And thus are we, even we,
Born of that wrong, that agony, that love.

[*Strophe* 5

What God then shall I praise in thought and word
For works more justly planned?
O Father, Planter of the Garden, Lord,
Thou of the Healing Hand;
Thinker of ancient thought,
Artificer of man,
Zeus, by whose breath, as by the wind, is brought
To the harbour every plan!

[*Antistrophe* 5

Behold, He hasteth not to do the thing
That others speak;
Being more high than any lord or king,
He maketh strong the weak.
Above Him is no throne:
No prayers below can bind
His doings, for the deed and word are one,
And one the counselling mind.

[DANAUS *with his retinue returns.*

DANAUS.

Rejoice, my children! Well for you and me
The people's voice hath passed its full decree.

LEADER.

I bless thee, Father. All thy words are well!
But tell us quick what way the issue fell,
What vote was passed, and by what multitude?

DANAUS.

All voted, all, with no divided mood,
Till my old heart was young again and stirred.
Gathered they stood, and at the herald's word
A myriad right hands quivered in the air
From that massed people, lifted to declare
That here we dwell, strangers within the gate,
By law protected and inviolate
'Gainst all who seek to take us, alien
Or Argive. And if war should follow, then

He who defends us not at need, shall stand
Dishonoured and go exiled from the land.
Thus spake Pelasgia's King, and turned their path
Toward mercy, warning of the eternal wrath
Of Zeus the Suppliant: "never let his folk
Uprouse it! For this day a twofold yoke
Full nigh the City lay, of grievous sin,
Wrong to the stranger, wrong to their own kin;
Whence in due time a monster should be reared,
Feeding on wounds and blood." All this they heard,
And straight, no question put nor heralding,
With lifted arms, cried to obey the King.

LEADER.

Ah, well the King his charmèd counsels spake,
Well the folk heard; but Zeus the end did make.
Speak upon Argos all ye would
Of prayers in recompense for good,
While Zeus, the Stranger and the Friend
Of strangers, watching, in good sooth
Our words of blessing turns to truth,
And guides them to their perfect end.

[*The* CHORUS *again take position for the Dance;*
DANAUS *mounts the Altar Steps.*

CHORUS.

Turn to me now your care,
Ye gods, ye children of God,
As I pour libation of prayer:
Let not this land be trod

By the feet of fire and lance
Nor a prey to Ares thrown,
Who singeth where none may dance,
Who reapeth, in fields not his own,
Men, as grain that is sown.
Argos hath pitied us:
Argos her vote hath given,
Aiding the lost army, who thus
Kneel unto Zeus in heaven.

They gave not to man his lust,
They mocked not the woman's war;
For they saw the Requital just
Of Zeus, they knew it afar.
It watcheth, yea it shall smite
In its season, a perilous foe;
The roof whereon it shall light
Shall be broken; a bird of woe,
Heavy it sits and slow.
These men, seeing their kin
Bowed before Zeus, revere them:
These at a shrine stainless of sin
Pray, and the gods shall hear them.

Therefore my veilèd mouth
Under its veil entreats:
Never may plague nor drouth
Lay waste this City's streets,
Nor kindred strife make red
The valleys with Argive dead.

Pluck not the flower of youth!
Let not the War-god cruel,
Lover of lust, scorner of ruth,
Tear from the land its jewel!

Brave be the Elders too,
And the altars flame in use
Of a land that to Zeus is true,
And most to the Stranger Zeus,
Whose gentle laws make straight
The tangle of mortal fate.
Let not the kingly seed
Ever in Argos languish;
Thou of the Bow, Comfort in need,
Watch over woman's anguish!

No bane by which men die
Come hither to waste the land—
On the hills a sudden cry,
And a sword in Ares' hand:
Ares, of tears the sire,
Who knows not dance nor lyre.
Far be the Pests that swarm,
Darkly, with sickness laden:
Lift as a shield, Phoebus, thine arm
High over youth and maiden!

May Zeus the fruitful earth
Fulfil as the seasons pass;
Abundant be the birth
Of flocks in the grazing grass:

All gifts to the folk be given
As men that are loved of heaven!
Bards, to the altar fire
Carry your gifts of story!
Voices of love waken the lyre;
Stainless be Argos' glory!

LEADER.

The people, who this City's power hath wrought,
Preserve its ranks and orders undistraught:
So reigns with Brotherhood foreseeing Thought.

To strangers and strange lands let them afford
Without long strife, Law and the healing Word,
And Justice grant ere any draw the sword.

With offerings due let laurel-bearers pray
The native gods who hold the land in sway,
And yield the wild bull's blood in the ancient way.

Thy gods, thy law, thy parents—so I deem
The rule is written in the eternal scheme
Of Zeus the King, in glory all-supreme.

DANAUS.

Daughters, your prayer so gentle likes me well.
Now tremble not. I have a tale to tell
New and unlooked-for. From this refuge high
Outlooking, in the distance I descry

A ship of Egypt. Aye, 'tis all too clear.
I know the gathered sail. I know the sheer
Drop of the shielded sides, and in what guise
The black prow seeks its way with gleaming eyes,
Too well—to my mind—answering each turn
Of the helmsman's guiding wrist, far in the stern.
I see the shipmen there: they catch the light
With such black limbs against their robes of white.
The small boats too, and all the furniture
Of battle can be seen: to guide them sure
Toward land the leading ship has furled her sail,
And rows, with all oars, in.—Our best avail
Is patience and a chastened heart; to set
Eyes to the truth and not the gods forget.
I will go seek some champion, or may be
Some advocate. From them an embassy
Must come, or herald, and prepare the way
To claim their kindred—or to seize their prey.
They shall not have their will! Be not afraid
Of herald nor of host! Yet, if my aid
Be slow to arrive, forget not, through all fear,
Your surest comfort and defence is here.
[*Pointing to the altars.*
Take heart. At last a day comes and an hour
When he who mocks the gods will feel their power.

LEADER.

Father, I shake with dread. The wingèd ship
Is here, is here! The cup is at my lip.

CHORUS. [*Strophe* 1

Terror uncomforted
Hath me. I fly from here . . .
Yet what help to have fled?
What refuge anywhere?
Father, I faint with fear.

DANAUS.

Take heart. Full sure the votes of Argos fell.
They will face war to save you, I know well.

LEADER.

Workers of death those wild Egyptians are—
Thou know'st them—and insatiate of war.

CHORUS. [*Antistrophe* 1

They launched their blue-eyed barque
Builded of bitter wood;
Their hate hath found its mark,
And here they swarm, a lewd
And black-limbed multitude.

DANAUS.

And multitudes they here shall find, with feet
And fists well toughened in the noonday heat.

LEADER.

But do not leave me, Father. Left alone
Woman is helpless: valour hath she none.

CHORUS. [*Strophe* 2

Treason is in their soul,
Ever of craft they plot;
Their very heart is foul—
Like carrion crows, who rot
By the altars, caring not.

DANAUS.

Would it not suit us well, child, if they trod
That path—to your hate and the hate of God?

LEADER.

What do they care for trident or for sign
Of heaven? They will not spare this flesh of mine!

CHORUS. [*Antistrophe* 2

Lifted with bitter pride,
With godless fury fraught,
Maddened with lust, they stride,
Shameless as dogs; and naught
Holy can pierce their thought.

DANAUS.

The wolf is stronger than the dog, 'tis said,
And byblus pith poor food by wheaten bread.

LEADER.

Oh, fierce and vain and noisome beasts they be,
Not dogs. Oh, let them not have hold on me!

DANAUS.

'Tis not so swift a business, to prepare
A landing force; to moor, to take full care
The cables hold; then, anchors, too, may slip,
And time goes ere the shepherd of the ship
Can lose his fears.—Aye, and they vex him most
Faced by an unknown and unharboured coast,
With the sun rolling nightward. Every night
Is pain to a pilot if he thinks aright,
And any landing needs must be delayed
Till safe the ship is moored.—Thou art still afraid?
Keep alway in thy mind, whate'er may chance,
The gods: while I go seek deliverance.
Argos will not disdain this herald, weak
In years belike, but strong to think and speak.

[*Exit* DANAUS

CHORUS. [*Strophe* 1

O bosomed Earth, O altar of my prayer
What is upon us? Whither can I fly?
In all this Apian land is there no lair
Hid deep from every eye?
I'd be a wisp of smoke, up-curled
To the soft clouds above the world,
Up, without wings, in the bright day,
Like dust, in dying streamers whirled
To pass in nothingness away.

[*Antistrophe* 1

The heart within my breast is passion-tossed
And will not sleep; mine eyes see nothing clear.
That sight my father saw has left me lost,
And my strength gone, with fear
Oh, better toward my doom to hie
In a rope's strangling agony,
Than lay this body down beside
The man I loathe. Oh, best to die!
Let Hades take his bride!

[*Strophe* 2

Some skyey throne—Oh, thither I would go,
Where the wet clouds, back-beaten, freeze to snow:
Some unbestridden, undescried,
Smooth vulture-crag, in lonely pride
Hanging; there to stand, and leap
Alone, alone, to the great deep,
Rather than face that forcèd Love
And the heart-stabbing shame thereof.

[*Antistrophe* 2

I fear not then a prey for dogs to lie,
A feast for all the vultures of the sky.
Once to be dead sets woman free
From every wrong and misery.
God give me to the grave instead
Of that polluting marriage bed.
What outlet can I hew, what path
To save us from this lust and wrath?

[*Strophe* 3

A sobbing voice, a music in the air,
Rising to God in prayers that still increase:
Thou hear'st them, Zeus! Let them fulfilment bear,
Fulfilment, freedom, stormless peace.

Look on this battle: mark the path
Of violence; let it know thy wrath:
And pity them that suppliant fall,
O Argive Zeus, O Lord of all!

[*Antistrophe* 3

The sons of Egypt, wantoning in pride,
In man's hot pride, pursue me as I fly:
They are swift of foot; their eyes mark where I hide:
Their hands grasp: shouting fills the sky.

O Zeus, in thy hands, come what may,
The scales of Fortune shift or stay,
And nothing to its end is sped
Save by the bowing of thy head.

Ah! Ah!

[*When they look up they see, already entering, the Egyptian* HERALD *with his fifty Black Slaves. The* DANAIDS *fly with confused cries, the Egyptians pursue. The cries become articulate.*

DANAIDS (*confusedly*).
The slaver is here
In the ship, on the shore
He graspeth, he claspeth:
Ah never! Before

That cometh, O grasper,
I shall fear thee no more!

From his galley on high
He swoopeth again:
The cry of my pain
Betrays where I lie.
See: it is here and begun, the day we must suffer or die,
The day that shall end us.
Away to refuge! On they come, tremendous
In scorn, luxurious scorn . . . I can no more!
A prison ship, and this a prison shore!
Lord of the Shore, defend us!

[*In the following Dance the* Danaids, *seeking to escape from the circle, are gradually driven back to the Great Altar.*

Herald.

Away, away to the galley!
Ye leaden feet of fear!
On, on, with you. Would ye dally?
Rendings of hair be here,
And irons your flesh to sear.
How? Would ye look on blood new-shed,
The trip-hook and the severed head?
Away, ye jades! Away, lest worse
Befall you, children of the curse!
Away to the galley!

CHORUS.

Oh, would, where the ways of disaster
Cross in the troughs of the brine,
Thou hadst died with the lust of thy master
And that black-morticed galley of thine.

HERALD.

To the galley, bloodily, back!
Though thy weeping be louder yet,
I command, I force thee. Slack
That failing hold, and forget
The desire and the madness. Back!
Leave the altar and come
To the black ship. Why should I pity
A woman lost, without home,
Without honour or city?

CHORUS.

Never again may I see
That water which filleth man's vein
With lifeblood, where wandereth free
The Hornèd One; never again!
My home is made evil by thee

HERALD.

Am I not a guide, I trusty and true,
To the altar steps, to the sanctuary? . . .
But the peaceful places are not for you.
For you the ship, the ship shall it be,

Love it or loathe it, the ship and the sea:
Where rough force waiteth plain
By day and night,
A girdle deep with pain.
And hands that smite.

CHORUS.

Aiai! Aiai!
Without help be thine hand
When upraised in despair!
Dead, dead, far from land
'Twixt the sea and the air
Mayst thou drift in the desert of waters
And beat on the sandshoals bare
Where dead Sarpêdon's grave
Rocks o'er the wandering wave,
And the winds rave!

HERALD.

Sob if you will, and shriek and pray! The ship
Of Egypt holds and will not let ye slip.

CHORUS.

Aiai! So strong, so vile!
Art thou a dog that howlest at the door?
Dost thou so foam with noise and rage? Therefore
May thine own god, who sees thee, the great Nile,
Sweep thy proud deeds to darkness evermore!

HERALD.

The ship's prow turns. Embark! Delay not there!
When once I drag, woe to the tressèd hair!

CHORUS.

The Gods fail me! They are not what they seem.
Seaward it makes me go,
This thing, this spider, slow,
Dark like an evil dream . . .
O Mother, Mother Earth, I am sore afraid;
Beat back my fear!
O Father, her first birth, Great Zeus, give aid!
Be with us here!

HERALD.

To these Greek gods we owe no vassalage;
Our youth they fed not, nor protect our age.
[*The* DANAIDS *are by now driven to the topmost parts of the Great Altar.*

CHORUS.

It reaches, reaches, this two-handed snake:
'Tis near me as I kneel.
The asp of Egypt crawls. Ah, what firedrake
In the holy place? Its fang is in my heel.
[*The* HERALD *has caught the* LEADER *by the foot.*

HERALD.

Come straightway to the ship, and be content;
Else ye shall come ashamed, with tunics rent.

CHORUS.

Chiefs of the City, bring
Aid, or they conquer me!

HERALD.

It seems then, since for my plain words ye care
So little, I must drag you by the hair.

[*He seizes the* LEADER *by the hair and drags her down.*

CHORUS.

I am lost. O King! My King!
I dreamed not this could be!

HERALD.

King? Egypt's sons will show you kings galore,
And masters. Ye will never ask for more.

[*Enter the* KING *with the Argive Host.*

KING.

Ho man, what wouldst thou? What possessed thy brain
To challenge with such brawling and disdain
This city of Argive men? Didst think that here
Were none but maids like these to meet thy spear?
Or doth the barbarous man so scorn the Greek?
Thy folly is much; thy wits seem far to seek.

HERALD.

Where is the wrong? What error have I wrought.

KING.

Not so demeaned thee as a stranger ought.

HERALD.

I have found the chattels I had lost. What more?

KING.

What strangers' Guardian didst appear before?

HERALD.

The greatest, Hermes, who the lost hath found.

KING.

He bade thee violate God's holy ground?

HERALD.

In Egypt dwell the Gods whom I obey.

KING.

And those of Greece are nothing, darest thou say?

HERALD.

Unless thieves hinder, here I take mine own.

KING.

But touch them, and thine every limb shall groan.

HERALD.

To a foreign guest this shows scant piety.

KING.

No wrecker of God's laws is guest to me.

HERALD.

That message I must bear to Egypt's sons?

KING.

It moves me little how thy message runs.

HERALD.

Still, I would fain for certain know my news
Ere I report: 'tis thus that heralds use.
What shall I say? Who is't, and by what powers,
Thus robs us of these damsels who are ours
By blood? 'Tis Ares that on this shall hold
Court, with no law nor witness; nor shall gold
Win for such deeds his pardon. For this day
Good men shall fall and lives be spurned away.

KING.

What boots my name to thee? In time enough
Thou and thy galley-mates shall hear thereof.
By their own will, in kindliness of heart,
With fair words, win these maidens to depart,
And none shall check you. . . . But one oath all through
My people hath prevailed, and standeth true,
Never these suppliant maidens to betray;
And fast with nails of iron that oath shall stay.

It is not writ on wax, not shut between
A book's dim pages, sealèd and unseen,
'Tis a clear word, outspoken to the light,
From a free tongue.
Go, get thee from my sight!

HERALD.

Ye know 'tis battle, if these maids prevail?
So be it! Power and victory to the male!

KING.

Not female shall ye find our dwellers here
In Argolis, nor drunk with barley beer!
[*Exit* HERALD *with followers.*
Take comfort now, and with your trusty band
Of handmaids seek the fortress of the land
Well-holden, girt with deep-devisèd towers.
Houses full many for your maiden bowers
Hath Argos, nor with puny strength am I
Be-castled. There in shelter ye may lie,
And ringed with swords. But if ye fain would use
Some single house alone, 'tis yours to choose.
Cull of these flowers whiche'er may please you best
And smell the sweetest. Here am I to attest
The City's will, and with me they whose charge
Is thus fulfilled. Who speaks with right more large?

LEADER.

O King of men, may blessings light
On thy good deeds! But prithee call
Our happy father: he, in all
Guiding our thought, will choose aright,

Some kindly place where we may dwell,
Fair-spoken, touched by no despite;
So swift is comon speech to smite
The alien.—Thus may all be well!

[*Exit* KING *with Retinue.*

Dear bondmaids, to your stations move;

[*Enter* CHORUS *of* HANDMAIDS.

And each beside that mistress stand,
For whom of old our Father planned
The dowery of your trusty love.

[*The* HANDMAIDS *take their position.*

DANAUS.

My children, to these Argives we must raise
Our voices, yea, give sacrifice and praise
As to Olympian gods. In our great need,
Not wavering in the scale, they were indeed
Our Saviours. For the tale of our distress
Woke in them love for us, and bitterness
'Gainst our pursuers. And these followers here
They have granted me, with many a trusty spear,

That neither in peace unhonoured I may go
Nor yet, chance-smitten by some random blow,
Die, and bring bane eternal on the state.
For such high bounties, see ye consecrate
Deep-hearted thankfulness; and one charge more
Grave in your hearts, with those ye have writ before,
Of this grey father's words. By time alone
In strange lands is the stranger judged and known;
Till then all men are quick to speak him wrong:
A thing so light and evil is man's tongue.
Wherefore I charge you bring me not to shame
With that young loveliness, which sets aflame
Man's longing. Hard to watch is ripening fruit.
All wild things gather round it, man and brute—
How else?—and all that crawls and all that flies.
"My grapes are ripe, are ripe," the Cyprian cries,
Nor leaves that momentary loveliness
To stay unchanged by longing. And no less
When such young grace and wonder passeth nigh
Of maidenhood, there leaps from every eye
An arrow of beseeching, and each heart
Faints with desire. Let us then play our part;
Lose not that prize for which ye have faced with me
Hard days of peril and long leagues of sea,
Lest our foes laugh and Danaus hide his head.
  Behold, a choice of dwellings here is spread
Before you: one the City gives and one
Pelasgus, free and feeless. 'Tis well done.
Only my charge remember. Steadfastly,
Dearer than life uphold your chastity.

LEADER.

By the Olympians' grace all peace be ours!
And fear not, Father, for my fruit nor flowers;
For, save God hides from me some purpose strange,
My bosom's path is clear, and shall not change.

[*The* DANAIDS *and their* HANDMAIDS *compose a dance together, with prayers of fruitfulness for Argos and virginity—or at least no marriage without love—for themselves.*

CHORUS OF DANAIDS.

Come with me, and give blessing to the Blessèd
Of Argos, O ye who are his daughters,
To the City-gods and them beside the waters
Of old Erasînus many-tressèd.

Upgather now the prayer and the praising,
Ye handmaids; your benison deliver
To Argos, and forget the old raising
Of our voices to the flood of Egypt's river.

Give blessing to the small streams flowing
With their sweet bright water through the meadows,
With the children on their banks growing, growing,
And the soil they make soft with liquid shadows.

O Artemis, incline thee to the paean,
God's Virgin, of the virgins who implore thee!
And thou: not by force, O Cytherean,
Be thy touch upon our flesh, lest we abhor thee!

HANDMAIDS (*warning them*).

Yet the Cyprian we forget not in our dances;
Like Hera, she is close at Jove's hand.
Her light thought, it quivers and it glances,
But her works, they are wondrous in the land.

For of Her comes the dumb heart that longeth,
And the soft word that fails not, though afraid;
And the music of the world to Her belongeth,
And the whisper of a man with a maid.

Yet my spirit for the fugitives great wailing
Foreseeth, and red battles yet to be:
So untroubled was the black galley's sailing,
So swift came the hunters o'er the sea!

What is there against Fate? What abating
Of Jove's deep purposes untold?
Let it end, then, like many another mating
Of women, man-mastered as of old!

DANAIDS.

God shelter me from Egypt and his wooing!

HANDMAIDS.

It were best so, for all men and for thee!

DANAIDS.

Shalt thou melt the unmelted by thy suing?

HANDMAIDS.

Has thy spirit read the things that shall be?

DANAIDS.

Can I see into the Mind that hath no measure?

HANDMAIDS.

If thy prayer be not bold, thou canst pray.

DANAIDS.

What hope, then, what yearning may I treasure?

HANDMAIDS.

To welcome God's will and to obey.

DANAIDS.

Oh, shield me from that kiss of hate,
That mastery of an evil mate,
O Io's Aid, O Zeus above!
On her thy hand was laid, and healed
Her anguish, thine her life was sealed,
And violence turned to love.

Give freedom, Zeus, to woman's will!
I accept the better part of ill,
The twofold life I praise.
As Justice is let Judgement be!
For this shall God's hand set us free,
For this our prayer we raise.

[*Exeunt* OMNES.

NOTES

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The Scene.—A Greek tragedy in the time of Sophocles had for its scene a round Orchestra, or Dancing ground, for the Chorus, and, behind this, cutting off a segment of the circle, a raised stage for the actors. In the centre of the orchestra was an altar of Dionysus. It seems clear that the *Supplices* was performed on the old circular orchestra, some thirty yards in diameter, with no stage; but the position of the "Common Altar" or "Sacred Hill" is far from clear. Was it in the centre, taking the place of the regular Altar of Dionysus? This suits the idea of a "hill" or "mound", and gives a better scheme for the Dance of Pursuit and Flight, but would interfere with the view of the spectators. Or was it right at the back, more or less in the position of the later stage, though outside the circle? This would leave more room for the large numbers required in the orchestra, and would suit the shape of the "Common Altar", if that was like most of the Common Altars known to us: a long table with the altars in a row.

As to the numbers on the stage, much depends on the question whether the Danaids were accompanied by their Handmaids all through the play, or whether these only appeared in the last scene. Without Handmaids there would be fifty Danaids, at least fifty Egyptian Slaves to carry them off, and at least fifty Argive soldiers to cow the Egyptian Slaves. This would give a maximum of rather over 150 persons

present at the same time. If the Handmaids are present from the beginning all these figures must be doubled. An orchestra 30 yards in diameter would hold a very large number of people, but we may notice that at the crowded moments—e.g. the two entries of the Argive host—the rest of the performers are cleared away on to the Sacred Hill.

There is no record of the production of the *Supplices*, and no clear evidence as to its date. It must be later than 499 B.C., which was Aeschylus' first appearance, and earlier—I should say, on grounds of style, much earlier—than the *Persae*, produced in 472 B.C. Many conjectures may be found in Vürtheim's introduction. I am inclined, tentatively, to agree with Mazon in putting the play earlier than the battle of Marathon (491–490 B.C.), and to connect it with the memories and emotions of the Ionian Revolt. The argument for this view, put briefly, is as follows. The Ionians appealed to Athens for help, even at the cost of war, against the barbarian Persian conqueror on the ground that they were Greeks and descended from Athens, and unless their Mother-City helped them they were lost. After the destruction of the Ionian cities in 494, Phrynichus produced a play, *The Sack of Miletus*, which was evidently a strong protest against the desertion of the Ionians by Athens. Phrynichus was prosecuted and fined; consequently any other poet writing in the same spirit would have to do so in carefully veiled form. Now in this play the Danaids come as Suppliants to Pelasgus, King of all Hellas, and plead

"in Ionian music" (v. 69), on the ground that they are his kindred and children of Io, for protection even at the cost of war against their barbarous Egyptian pursuers; and the whole discussion whether war, with all its horrors, is not less bad than the betrayal of a suppliant kinsman, is treated fully and with great emotion. It may well be that Aeschylus at the time of writing was feeling strongly the desertion of Ionia.

P. 33, l. 1, CHORUS: This does not mean that the whole Chorus spoke together. We do not know how the various strophes were distributed among different speakers or groups.

P. 33, l. 6, A stranger was usually an exile, an exile usually a political refugee or a criminal.

P. 34, l. 17, "One who fled, etc.": Io; see Introduction, pp. 18 ff.

P. 34, l. 22, Olive-branches wrapped in wool, the regular sign of a suppliant. Cf. the modern "white flag" as a sign of peace or surrender.

P. 34, l. 38, "mesh of law": i.e. by claiming the rights of next of kin (see l. 386, and Introduction, p. 16).

P. 35, l. 48, "Epaphus": In the time of Aeschylus *Ἔπαφος* was the Greek representation of the Egyptian Ḥapi, son of the Horned Moon or Cow, Isis, and seemed to mean "touch" (*ἐπαφή*). In Plutarch and later Greek Ḥapi is called Apis; but the Apis mentioned below as having given the name "Apia" to the Peloponn-

nese is an entirely different person. For the Virgin Birth of Epaphus see on l. 580.

P. 35, l. 61, The Nightingale-fable has many variants. In Aeschylus it seems that the wife of Têreus King of Thrace killed her child (Itys) in fury at her husband's infidelity; she was changed into a nightingale (Aëdon), and weeps over the deed she has done, while Têreus, changed to a hawk, pursues her. The Danaids, like her, are driven away from their accustomed place, pursued by enemies and friendless.

P. 37, ll. 76–101, This sudden change from mere song to deep religious musing is very characteristic of Aeschylus. Observe also how close to monotheism his worship of Zeus becomes.

P. 37, l. 86, I keep the MS. reading, and translate literally: "May the desire of Zeus be all-truly of Zeus."

P. 38, l. 116, "O bosomed Earth": Earth can surely understand the language of all the children of Earth? Or, if not, she at any rate understands the gestures of mourning.

P. 40, ll. 145 ff. There were two "virgin daughters of Zeus", Athêna and Artemis: which is meant here? To an Athenian audience of the later part of the fifth century "the virgin of Zeus who holds the august portal (or fronting wall) unshakeable" would inevitably mean Athêna in the Parthenon. But the Parthenon was not built till after Aeschylus' death, and neither the temple which preceded the Parthenon nor the ancient pre-Persian Propylaea seems to have had so

great a place in the public imagination. Also Athêna is not elsewhere invoked in the play, while Artemis is, 676 and 1031. It seems probable, then, that Artemis is meant, and that we do not understand the allusion to the *ἐνώπια*.

P. 40, l. 154, "Dark our cheek . . .", etc.: Hades was to darkness and the dead what Zeus was to light and the living; hence he was "the dark Zeus" or "Zeus of the darkness".

P. 41, l. 161, "Alas for Io . . .", etc.: The wrath of the gods is pitiless and searches out every offence; whereas their love of the daughters of men brings only violence and misery.

P. 42, l. 188, "Gathered Gods": or, Gods of Gathering. All the gods worshipped in the Agora are here brought together at one vast common altar. We hear in Strabo of an "Altar of the Twelve Gods" (p. 923), and in Pausanias of one "to all the Gods in common" (v. 15, 1).

P. 43, ll. 206–212, The order of these lines seems to have been disarranged in the MSS. In one place I have added a line ("We are with thee . . .", etc.).

P. 44, l. 220, "Hermes": identified with Thoth, the Egyptian Herald; but the Hermes carved here is very different from that ibis-headed god.

P. 45, l. 231, This emphasis on the Judgement of the Dead gives an Egyptian colour to the passage; cf. the "Book of the Dead". The doctrine, however, was well known in Greece.

P. 45, l. 238, Literally: "Without heralds or

proxenoi." Ordinarily travellers entering a foreign country would send a herald (with signs of peace) to announce their coming, and then a *proxenos* or official "protector of strangers" would do for them much what a consul does nowadays.

P. 46, ll. 251–260, This account of an early but apparently not pre-Hellenic Kingdom of the Pelasgi, embracing practically all the mainland of Greece, is not necessarily to be taken as historical, though it had much influence on Ephorus and other Greek historians.

P. 47, ll. 278–290, The Danaids evidently had an exotic and Amazonian appearance. In an early epic, the *Danais,* they actually did battle in Egypt with the sons of Aegyptus.

Pp. 47 ff, ll. 291–321, On this Sacred Logos see Introduction, p. 19.

P. 49, l. 311, "Epaphus": see above, l. 47.

P. 51, l. 331, The language is compressed, but the meaning fairly clear. KING: "Do you reject them because their proposal is unlawful, or just because you dislike them?" LEADER: "Oh, if we liked them we should not complain!" KING: "If it is only a question of dislike you should remember the economic advantages of marrying within the family." LEADER: "You say that because you want to get rid of us."

P. 53, l. 360, "The God who ordereth Fate must yet know ruth", i.e. Pity; and therefore Prayer has its function in the chain of cause and effect.

P. 53, l. 368, "It were vain to answer till my

people's will is plain": The King here is made democratic and constitutional, so as not to conflict with the principle of Argive democracy. Cf. the usual treatment of Theseus in tragedy (e.g. in Euripides' *Supplices*) as the champion of Athenian democracy.

P. 54, l. 392, "I will not suffer . . .", etc.: i.e. Law or no law, there are some wrongs which I will die rather than endure.

P. 56, ll. 440 ff., A difficult passage. I take it to mean: "I must needs bring my boat to land", i.e. hesitate no longer. "The ship-bolts (to which the cables are fastened) are firm in the hull, and the windlass is pulling her up the beach."

P. 57, l. 449, "Kindred blood": Of course the sons of Aegyptus are descended from Io as well as the Danaids.

P. 59, ll. 493 ff., There would be many wayside shrines and even secret "holy places" which a stranger could hardly find, and at which his presence might well give offence unless he was duly authorized and escorted.

Pp 61 ff., ll. 524–600, The Io chorus: see Introduction, p. 21. This poem is a signal instance of the power of creative imagination working on primitive material.

P. 63, l. 559, "Fed by distant snow": This phrase has been used as a means of dating the play. The theory that the Nile came from melting snow is ascribed to Anaxagoras by Theophrastus (*Hippol. Refut.* i. 8), but this may only mean that it was the

theory given in Anaxagoras' book, not that it was invented by him. He did not actually come to Athens till 463 B.C.

P. 64, l. 580, The virgin birth of Epaphus through the hand, word, or breath of a divine being has, of course, many parallels: see Vürtheim's Introduction, *Wunderzeugung*.

Pp. 66 ff. 1, ll. 625–709, This prayer of blessing may be compared to the finer one in the *Eumenides*, 916 ff., the refrain here with that in *Agamemnon*, 355–474

P. 68, l. 663, Ares is (1) paramour of Aphrodite, (2) "murderer of men": i.e. he combines lust with bloodthirstiness, like the Egyptians.

P. 70, l. 726, Why does Danaus leave his daughters at this moment? See l. 753. In view of his traditional reputation for "cunning", it looks as if he wanted the enemy to put themselves in the wrong by committing sacrilege.

P. 72, l. 760, The wolf was the emblem of Argos, as shown e.g. on Argive coins. The Egyptians are "dogs" because of the last words of the Chorus: the byblus-pith which they eat and the barley-beer which they drink are treated as contemptible in comparison to the wheaten bread and good wine of the Greeks. Cf. 953.

P. 74, l. 795, The string of adjectives in the Greek is striking.

Pp. 75–80, ll. 825–900, Throughout this scene the MS. is often completely unintelligible and apparently mutilated, particularly in the Herald's speeches. The

mutilation of the archetype may be due to accidental damage; but it seems certain that Aeschylus made his barbarian Herald speak in such a way as to suggest barbaric language, and probably this confused the copyists. Similarly in the *Persae* there are phrases where the Greek is strained so as to give a Persian or Oriental colour (cf. Aristophanes' *Frogs*, 1028, who says, incorrectly, that Aeschylus made his Persians exclaim "Yow-oy!"). The effect in the *Persae* is very fine; in the dithyramb of the same name by Timotheus it is carried to lengths which make it ridiculous. I have in part guessed at the meaning of the mutilated lines, in part omitted them.

P. 77, l. 853, Obscure. I take it that she wishes never again to see the nourishing Nile nor the sacred cattle; her home has been made intolerable.

P. 79, l. 881, "The ship's prow turns": If this is the meaning, he sees the ship turning so as to be ready to start.

Pp. 79 f., ll. 895–910, Besides the mutilation of the Herald's speech (ll. 895–900) there seems to be some disarrangement of the order of the speeches up to l. 910.

P. 81, l. 920, The god Hermes, like St. Nicholas, was a Finder of Lost Property. The Herald ought to have applied to a "*Proxenos*"—an official whose business was to look after strangers in difficulty. He says, impudently, that he went straight to Hermes, who did all that was necessary! "And after speaking to a god on the subject you proceed to insult the gods by your conduct?" "Your gods have no authority

over me; I worship the gods of Egypt." Observe that the Greek instinctively pays reverence to all gods; the Egyptian is represented as only recognizing his own—like the Jew.

P. 85, ll. 996 ff., The emphasis laid in these last words on the duty of chastity seems to me to show conclusively that Wilamowitz and others are wrong in regarding the Danaids as guilty of a kind of *Hubris* or sin.

P. 85, ll. 1001–2, These two lines are generally regarded as badly corrupt: I translate them practically as they stand (*κωλύουσα τὼς μένειν ἔρῳ*).

P. 86, l. 1020, "Erasînus many-tressèd": The Erasînus was broken into many little channels for irrigation.

Pp. 86-88, ll. 1018–1074, Final Chorus. The assignment of these verses to their proper speakers is difficult. It seems that the Danaids (1) speak a blessing of fertility on Argos, (2) pray to Artemis to preserve their virginity, and to Aphrodite that they may not suffer violence. The Handmaids say: (1) Yes, but do not forget the due rights and power of Aphrodite; (2) In spite of our sympathy we fear that the gods are on the side of the pursuers; if so, it will be still the old story of woman mastered by man, irrespective of her wishes. In the dialogue that follows the Danaids again assert that they will never give way. "How can you tell what the purpose of Zeus may be?" return the Handmaids; "you can only pray, not that the purpose be changed, but that, whatever it is, you may accept

it willingly." "As Zeus had mercy on Io", reply the Danaids, "so may He have on us. We accept the two-fold life of marriage, as long as we have freedom of choice. Only let the Law that governs us not be mere injustice!"

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